

Comments on Proposed Wolf Hunt

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Michigan's 2008 Wolf Management Plan states that most wolf-related conflicts can be best handled on a case-by-case basis. But, instead of targeting "problem animals," as was suggested by DNR staff during their recent round of public meetings, MDNR is recommending three hunting "Units," totaling 2000 square miles or well over a million acres. A hunt of this nature hardly seems "targeted" and cannot ensure that only problem animals are taken.

It seems that the decision to implement a hunt was and is being driven by political pressure from pro-hunting groups who are eager to have yet another listed animal to "harvest," whether or not they believe it is necessary to create or maintain some sort of artificial "balance of nature." In fact, there is no such thing as a permanent balance, since it is the "nature" of things to be in flux! Without continual human intervention, predator and prey generally keep each other in check, making our meddling both unnecessary and ill-advised.

The Wolf Management Plan states that "...wolves do not pose a significant threat to the sustainability of prey populations in Michigan, nor are they expected to significantly reduce the number of deer and other prey available for public harvest or other human uses." In fact, wolves can improve the health of the herd by keeping disease in check and prey species on the move. And according to wolf experts Mech and Peterson, it's rare for wolves to kill wild prey in surplus.

Wolves do not present a significant threat to people, either. The Wolf Management Plan says, "As of this writing, a wolf attack on a human has never been documented in Michigan or in any of the other 47 contiguous States," and that "the public may receive inaccurate or exaggerated impressions of the extent of wolf-related conflicts." The Plan suggests lethal methods of "control" only when human safety is threatened. Eliminating a particularly aggressive or perhaps a rabid animal would constitute a truly targeted removal.

During the DNR's recent public meeting in Marquette, staff was asked about the seriousness of wolf-human conflicts in the Ironwood area, which was said to be the most troublesome region. Most incidents involved wolves chasing dogs onto decks or simply standing their ground. "A few" pets were attacked; there were *no* attacks on humans.

It was also stated that residents of the Ironwood area were feeding deer within the city limits and that MDNR had no plans to restrict that practice. Is it right to knowingly attract wolves and then shoot them for showing up? DNR staff says they've made efforts to educate people so as to reduce the deer feeding in problem areas like Ironwood.

Education doesn't always work—that's why we have seatbelt laws, for example. The Management Plan suggests modifications in law, policy and/or enforcement in order to more effectively discourage human activities that increase the risk of wolf predation. This recommendation is not being followed. If I plant strawberries in my yard and the resident chipmunks eat them, am I justified in killing those chipmunks? If you answered yes, some soul-searching is in order.

The citizens of this State are petitioning their government to allow a direct vote on whether or not there should be a wolf hunt in Michigan. Senator Casperson is attempting to subvert this process with a bill that was introduced on April 9 and finds itself in committee this very morning.

In a Marquette Monthly interview, recently retired State Representative Steve Lindberg provides some insight into a broken legislative process:

Bills were being forced through the legislature that had not been reviewed in committee, had no public comment, and in many cases, legislators had not even seen a final version of the bill. Things were rammed through, and I don't care who is in the majority, that type of action is not serving the best interests of Michigan.

It should be shocking to all of you that Casperson's bill, SB 288, intends to essentially tear up the ballot before we get to the polls. Last time I checked, our government was still supposed to be a democracy.

I am opposed to a hunt, but if permits are to be issued, they should go to Michigan residents only and should target specific "problem animals," as suggested in the Wolf Management Plan.

Leghold traps have been banned by more than 85 nations, and have been declared inhumane by both the American Veterinary Medical Association and the World Veterinary Association. Please don't allow them to be used in a wolf hunt. If these "problem wolves" are as bold as people say, hunters should have no trouble catching up with them. It follows, then, that baiting and calls should not be necessary, either.

The number of permits MDNR is proposing to issue is far too large and would encourage human depredation of wolves. If the "three S's" are a problem now, just think what they'll be like if 1200 hunters are turned loose with licenses in hand.

Lastly, there is no need to rush to implement a hunt. Wolf populations in Michigan appear to be leveling off on their own. There is no emergency situation anywhere in the UP, nor is there likely to be one in the near future. NRC declined to establish a moose hunt, and it turned out to be a wise decision. They can do the same with the wolves.

Thank you.